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UNCLAS ROME 003899

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FROM US MISSION TO UN AGENCIES ROME

DEPARTMENT FOR IO, PRM, DEPT. PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA, USDA/FAS
(CHAMBLISS), VIENNA ALSO FOR UNVIE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FAO RELUCTANT TO CLARIFY POSITION ON GM FOOD AID, EVEN
TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: 1) USUN 1978, 2) STATE 147644, 3) ROME 3676

¶11. SUMMARY - ACTING PERMREP AND AG COUNSELOR MET WITH TOP LEVEL FAO OFFICIALS TO EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN WITH GUIDANCE THAT IS BEING DISSEMINATED IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES BY FAO REPRESENTATIVES. FAO'S MIXED MESSAGE HAS MADE LOCAL GOV'T OFFICIALS MORE RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT U.S. FOOD AID LIKELY TO CONTAIN GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) CORN. US PERMREP URGED FAO TO CLARIFY GUIDANCE TO THE FIELD. FAO OFFICIALS PROMISED TO INFORM DIRECTOR GENERAL (DG) JACQUES DIOUF OF U.S. DEMARCHE, BUT WE BELIEVE RESPONSE MAY BE INSUFFICIENT TO REMOVE DOUBTS ABOUT GM CONTENT OF FOOD AID. END SUMMARY

¶12. US PERM REP AND AG COUNSELOR MET ON AUGUST 7 WITH SENIOR ADVISOR TO FAO DG MICHEL SAVINI AND ASSISTANT DG LOUISE FRESCO TO URGE FAO TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ALLEVIATING CONCERN ABOUT GM CONTENT OF U.S. FOOD AID TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES. THE UNITED STATES HAS RECEIVED A NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT REPORTS FROM RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS IN THE FIELD INDICATING THAT FAO REPRESENTATIVES IN THE REGION HAVE BEEN ADVISING GOVERNMENTS ON FOOD SAFETY ASPECTS OF GM CORN. FURTHERMORE, WHAT IS MOST DISTURBING IS THAT THIS ADVICE MAY BE CONTRARY TO ACCEPTED FAO POLICY. IT APPARENTLY DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT CURRENT SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE CONCEDES THAT THERE IS NO RISK

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TO HUMAN HEALTH FROM GM FOODS, A RESULT WHICH IS ESPECIALLY CRUCIAL IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN CONFUSED ABOUT POTENTIAL RISKS WHICH HAS GENERATED FEAR AND LED TO INACTION.

¶13. SAVINI AGREED WITH U.S. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA BUT STATED FAO HAD ALREADY TAKEN REMEDIAL ACTION. HE CITED THE DG'S LETTER DATED JULY 25 TO UN UNDER SECRETARY FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS OSHIMA (ALSO SENT TO U/S ALAN LARSON UNDER A SEPARATE COVER LETTER DATED JULY 31) WHICH AIMED AT CORRECTING MISINFORMATION CONTAINED IN HIS JULY 10TH LETTER. THE EARLIER LETTER'S REFERENCE TO THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL APPEARS TO BE AMONG REASONS FOR MISLEADING INFORMATION BEING PROVIDED BY FAO REPRESENTATIVES TO AFRICAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. IN THE U.S. VIEW, THE JULY 25 LETTER STILL PROVIDES NO CLEAR GUIDANCE ON FOOD SAFETY ASPECTS OF GM FOODS.

¶14. FODAG OFFICIALS URGED FAO TO ISSUE CLEAR GUIDANCE TO REPRESENTATIVES IN ALL SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY DROUGHT IMMEDIATELY TO COUNTERACT CURRENT CONFUSION. SAVINI REMARKED THAT THE DG COULD NOT ENDORSE GMO'S BEFORE THE REVIEW PROCESS UNDERWAY IN CODEX ALIMENTARIUS IS COMPLETED WITHOUT RISKING POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS AT THE NEXT FAO COUNCIL MEETING. U.S. REP COUNTERED THAT THERE COULD ALSO BE ADVERSE REACTION IF PEOPLE ARE STARVING DUE TO THEIR GOVERNMENTS RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT U.S. FOOD AID. ADG FRESCO COMMENTED

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THAT AT MOST, THE FAO COULD SAY THAT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT ANY ILL EFFECTS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO GMO'S SINCE GMO'S APPEARED ON THE U.S. MARKET IN THE 1990'S.

¶15. THE U.S. REPRESENTATIVES AGAIN URGED FAO TO USE ITS VOICE OF INTERNATIONAL RESPECT AND AUTHORITY TO SPEAK OUT CLEARLY AND FORCEFULLY TO POLICY MAKERS AND OTHER OPINION LEADERS ON THE SCIENTIFIC REALITY OF GM FOODS. THE UNITED STATES BELIEVES THIS COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN RELIEVING HUMAN SUFFERING IN THE CURRENT CRISIS.

¶16. SAVINI ASKED FOR SPECIFIC INSTANCES WHERE MISINFORMATION ALLEGEDLY HAD BEEN PROVIDED TO HOST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BY THE FAO. THE U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT WAS BESIDE THE POINT. RATHER, ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN TO

CORRECT MISINFORMATION PROMULGATED TO DATE. SAVINI PROMISED TO CONVEY U.S. CONCERNS TO DG DIOUF, WHO IS OUT OF THE COUNTRY, BUT COULD NOT PREDICT HIS WHAT HIS REACTION MIGHT BE.

17. COMMENT - WE ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC TANGIBLE ACTION WILL RESULT FROM OUR DEMARCHE, BUT WE BELIEVE WE DID BREAK THROUGH THE FAO'S COMPLACENT ATTITUDE. WE ARE MORE

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ACTION IO-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	USNW-00	DODE-00	ITCE-00	WHA-00	SRP-00
	EB-00	EXME-00	EUR-00	OIGO-00	E-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01	SSA-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01
	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-01	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	ACE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	/013W						

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R 090531Z AUG 02
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5324
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
SADC COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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SUBJECT: FAO RELUCTANT TO CLARIFY POSITION ON GM FOOD AID, EVEN TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

CONFIDENT THAT WFP ED, JIM MORRIS, WHO WAS RECENTLY NAMED SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL FOR THE DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, WILL ACT SWIFTLY. WE UNDERSTAND MORRIS HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH TAKING ACTION IN CONSULTATION WITH FAO AND WHO. HOWEVER, HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE WAITING FOR THESE OTHER UN AGENCIES TO WAKE UP TO WHAT IS HAPPENING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND POTENTIALLY DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRENT DROUGHT BEFORE HE STARTS THE RELIEF EFFORT. END COMMENT.
HEILEMAN

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